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**CHILDREN, MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY. ROMANIAN  
CHILDREN PARTICIPATING IN PROTESTS**

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***Abstract***

Romanian children's participation in protests and marches held in February 2017, in all Romanian big cities, brought a real novelty into the national public space. With the support of media and online networks, children became an important topic for the national and international public communication, being the messages-carriers of what was written on banners, becoming a loud voice able to express civic and democratic messages. Such facts presented in all media channels of communication have risen questions about the suitability of children's participation in public civic events, about the real and expected impact, about the aim pursued and the one achieved through their presence on the streets, as well as the direct educational influence on them. This empirical study is based on information provided by the family, who is the main decision-maker in children's involvement and the one who supports their public participation. Using an online survey, with over 80 responders, we aimed to investigate the perceptions of socially active parents regarding the social values promoted by the participation of children in protests. Using the qualitative analysis of the parents' answers we have considered them sources of qualitative information about messages that convey moral and civic meanings. The study focuses on revealing the dimensions of the social values promoted by parents, messages that are related to concepts such as civic and political education, active participation, political socialization, terms subsumed to the sphere of the sociology of childhood, opening a multi-perspective overview about this particular aspect.

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**Keywords:** Protest, children, participation, values, civic education.



## 1. Introduction

The concept of political culture was firstly brought to attention by Almond and Powell (1966) who considered that political culture of a society "consists of attitudes, beliefs, values, and skills which are current in an entire population, as well as those special propensities and patterns which may be found within separate parts of that population" (p. 23). Also we will consider political culture to imply an active or a passive form of knowledge, emotions and values related to political subjects and to events that are happening in a particular society. Dogan and Pelassy (1993) consider that the concept of political culture "designates a set of political beliefs, feelings, and values that prevail for a nation at a certain time" (p.71). One of the first modern studies that analyse the topic of political culture in democracy belongs to Almond and Verba (1963) *Civic Culture, Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations*, (p.13) that defines political culture as political orientations or attitudes towards the political system. These authors have generally asserted that political culture has broad implications that affect the performance of the political systems (Almond & Verba, 1963, p. 31-34).

As a free public manifestation of ideas, opinions, beliefs and values, the protest is considered one of the indicators of modern democracies. It is a specific manifestation of political culture and it is an active way for citizens to get involved in the country's governing act. Turner (1969) considers that "An act of protest includes the following elements: the action that expresses a grievance, a conviction of wrong or injustice; the protestors are unable to correct the condition directly by their own efforts; the action is intended to draw attention to the grievances; the action is further meant to provoke ameliorative steps by some target group; and the protestors depend upon some combination of sympathy and fear to move the target group in their behalf" (p.816). Opp (2009), considers that a protest is: "1. an action or a behaviour as a joint action; 2. the actors object to one or more decisions of a target, so the actors have at least one common goal; 3. the actors are unable to achieve their goals by their own efforts, instead, they put pressure on targets; 4. the behaviour is not regular, it is «unconventional». An action may be «unconventional» if there are no institutional rules prescribing that it is repeated over time" (p.34).

Related to political culture and protest, it is also the concept of political socialization process. In his study, Greenberg (2009) defines political socialization as the procedure through which people accept the convictions and the principles of the political system they belong to and that determines their personal roles. This definition is built on the premise that political socialization is the learning "process by which the individual acquires attitudes, beliefs and values relating to the political system of which he is a member and to his own role as a citizen within that political system" (p.3). Models mediated by different agents such as family, school, institutions and organizations, media, the entire society as a whole, are mentioned in many studies on this topic (Easton & Dennis, 1969; Kawata, 1986; Ross, 1984; Bragaw, 1989; Shaheen, 1989; Allen, 1989). In the *International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences*, Greenstein (1968) defines political socialization as "any political, formal and informal, deliberate and unplanned learning process at any stage of the life cycle, including not only the explicit political learning but also the non-political symbolic learning" (p.55). This definition emphasizes that socialization is a progressive learning process in a continuous change. It is also worth mentioning that the definition includes references to both formal education (school) and informal elements such as media, the influence of the social group, institutions, the political regime and all the others social factors.

## 2. Problem Statement

In the present context, not only for Romania, but also at a worldwide level, the novelty of children participating in public manifestation is indisputable. Thus, the presence of children participating in protests raises a series of questions for educators, psychologists, educational and social scientists about the suitability of their participation in civic events and about the impact it has on children's education. This research is focused on revealing the parents' intentions that can be identified in the children's presence in protests.

## 3. Research Questions

What particular social values are parents trying to promote through their children's involvement in protests? Our aim is to identify which specific categories related to the axiological field can be recognised in the parents' discourse (cognitive, behavioural, attitude-evaluative, affective dimension). Thus, we intend to describe, based on the content analysis of written material, the parents' attitudes and perceptions regarding the values promoted through the children's participation in protests.

## 4. Purpose of the Study

Our aim is to explore the perceptions of socially active parents regarding the values promoted through the participation of children in protests, using as main source of information the family, who is the main decision-maker and the one that supports their involvement in this activity. For this, we will use the next working definition of values: "Values are explicit or implicit conceptions of what is desirable. They are not directly observable, but involve cognitive, evaluative and emotional elements, are relatively stable over time, they generate behaviours and attitudes, determine and are determined by other values, and the characteristics of the social environment" (Voicu, 2010, p.261).

The variable is the value described by the following categories:

1. cognitive dimension: knowing, understanding, learning; 2. behavioural-active dimension: to participate, to act, to make, to defend, to express, to take part; 3. attitudinal dimension: acting, believing, sustaining; 4. affective dimension: not be afraid, to be happy, to be proud; 5. evaluative dimension: honesty (not to steal), dignity, social justice.

This categorization also corresponds to the theoretical approach of Almond and Verba (1963) which underlines the idea that political culture is synonymous with the frequency of the following types of guidelines: 1. "cognitive orientation", that is, knowledge of and belief about the political system, its roles and the incumbents of these roles, its inputs and its outputs; 2. "affective orientation" or feelings about the political system, its roles, personnel and performance; 3. "evaluational orientation", the judgments and opinions about political objects that typically involve the combination of value standards criteria with information and feelings (p.15).

## 5. Research Methods

**Information gathering.** The survey was realised based on the on-line questionnaire addressed to the members of on-line community. *Children and Democracy questionnaire* (Stiri.ONG, 2017) was filled by 80 respondents between April 30<sup>th</sup> 2017 and July 20<sup>th</sup> 2017. Among the questions related to the topic of

children's participation in protests, we have chosen the answers to three open questions: 1. **motivation for participation** - Item 3.6. What is the motivation for you to have chosen to participate with your child/children in protest? 66 answers; 2. **importance of involvement** - Item 3.7. Why do you consider important for children to participate in protests, along with their parents? 60 answers; 3. **message sent to children** - Item 3.8. What is the message you want to convey to your child/children by engaging him/her/they in protests/marches that you have participated in? 59 answers.

**Information processing and coding.** We have chosen the aggregated answers to three open questions considering the aim of the present study and the topic of our research. The answers were aggregated in a text of 2680 words that was considered to be the unit of analysis. In the process of coding we considered the "value" the main concept that was associated with 5 categories, described by verbal indicators. Thus, the coding unit, or the word, in going to be our main instrument for the present analyse.

**Data Interpretation.** We applied the technique of content analysis using the Voyant Tools program on the parents' answers to the three open questions. Voyant Tools is an open-source, web-based application for performing text analysis, such as word frequency lists, frequency distribution plots, and KWIC displays.

## 6. Findings

A brief analysis of the presence, the frequency and the distribution of the concepts in the aggregated text applying LIWC program reveals the following features: (Table 01)

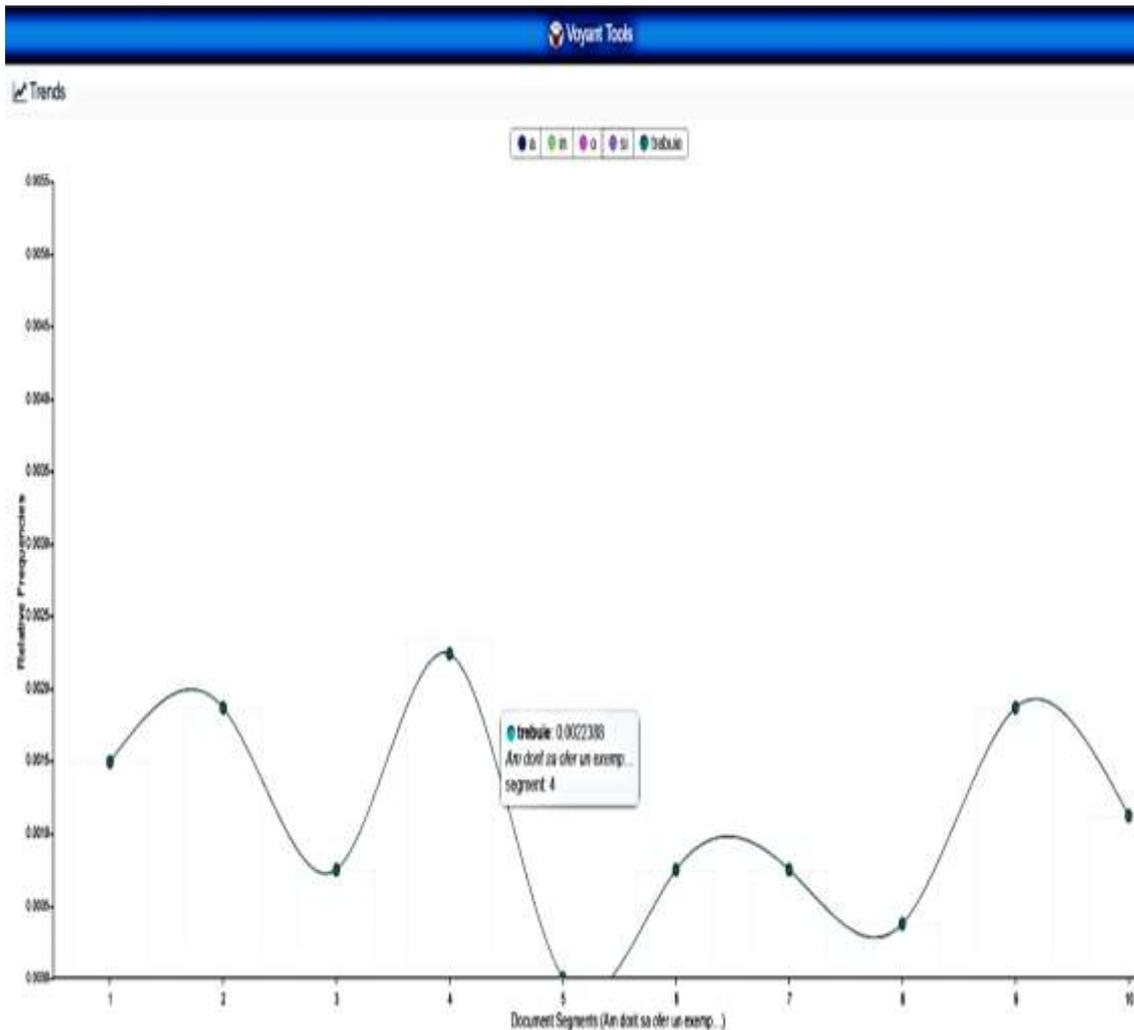
1. LIWC ResultsDate/Time: 7 August 2018, 10:44 am, the text you submitted was 2680 words in length.

**Table 01.** Analysis of the presence, the frequency and the distribution of the concepts in the text:

LIWC dimension	Your data	Personal texts	Formal texts
Self-references (I, me, my)	0.69	11.4	4.2
Social words	0.33	9.5	8.0
Positive emotions	0.99	2.7	2.6
Negative emotions	0.55	2.6	1.6
Overall cognitive words	1.53	7.8	5.4

According to the methodological theory, "The word frequency usually indicates the important themes of the text" (Agabrian, 2006, p.23). Taking into consideration this criterion, the important themes of the text are: children\*(58), involve\*(33), participate\*(31). However, although the word "fear"(7), does not indicate a high frequency in the basic text, the code is very important for the entire study at the level of the affective dimension indicators, which justifies our decision to consider it as a significant word in the emotional semantic category.

As for the frequency of the different indicators, the text analysis using the Voyant Tool Program highlights, with the exception of the link words, that the word must\*(30) has the highest frequency and a relatively constant distribution along the text.(Figure 01)



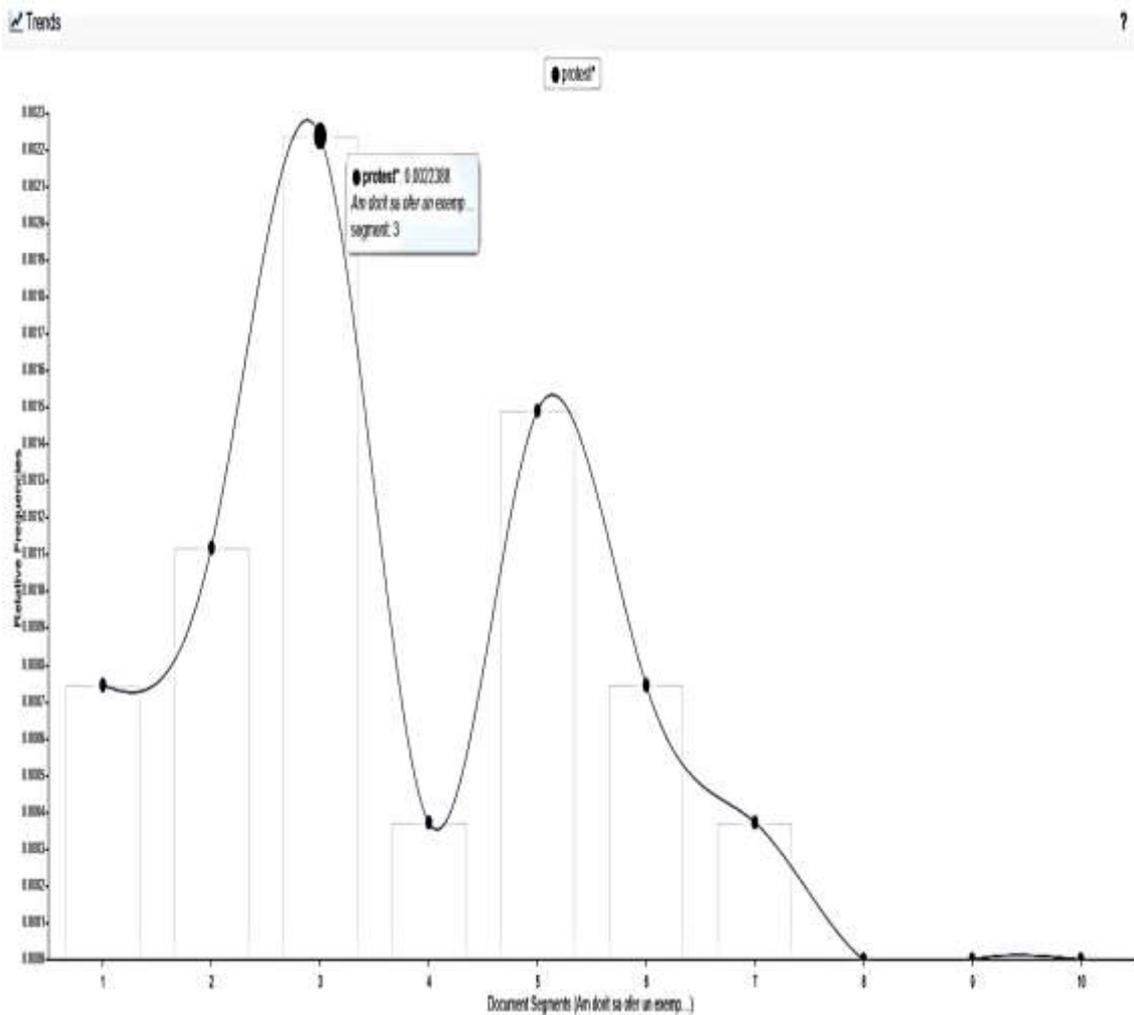
**Figure 01.** The distribution of *must\** is highlighted by a higher frequency than any other explicit term

In terms of absolute frequency, at the level of different dimensions that contain the values emphasized by the parents in their discourse, we can hierarchize them by the criterion of importance:

1. **behavioural-activedimension** with indicators like "to participate", "to act", "to make", "to defend", "to express", "to take part" related with codes like: participate\* (31), action\*(13) supportive\*(3), defend\*(5), conduct\*(2) - total 63 indicators
2. **attitudinal dimension:** "to believe", "to support", "to dare", "to take attitude", with the indicators upheld\*(10), responsible\*(8), believe\*(1), attitude\*(1), civic\*(15) - total 53 items
3. **evaluative dimension:** "honesty (not to steal)", "dignity", "justice": rights\*(5), dignity\*(1), sample\*(13), value\*(1), truth\*(1), lie\*(1), community\*(11) - total 36 items
4. **cognitive dimension** with indicators like "to know", "to understand", "to learn", using the codes: learn\*(10), know\*(6), idea\*(7), understand\*(1) - total 24 units
5. **affective dimension:** "not to be afraid", "to be happy", "to be proud", indicators: fear\* (7), emotions\*(1), feeling\*(1), trust\*(2) - total 11 items

Thus, we can state that the attention of the respondents focuses on sending messages that predominantly reveal the behavioural-active dimension. The adults are urging for action, for involvement, for participation, but they are also discussing subjects such as the values promoted and that are in accordance with the model

provided by themselves. For this interpretation there is a limit, such as the existence of indicators that could be part of at least two dimensions: the word "protest", for example, was not included in the encoding list, to avoid ambiguity. The word "protest" (Figure 02) can refer to both behavioural and evaluative aspects.



**Figure 02.** Frequency of the word protest\* in text

The relational or semantic analysis based on conceptual links, examines the relationships between concepts. In order to accomplish the proximity analysis, which is focused on the concomitant occurrence of explicit concepts in the text, we will associate the codes two by two just to highlight the links between the codes. We will determine a sequence of words of given length, by looking at the links between the units of measurement and by identifying the simultaneous presence of explicit concepts in the text. The proximity criterion that we applied over the text would have verified the concomitant presence of the concepts, thus creating the conceptual matrix of the unit analysis (Agabrian, 2006, p.101). Frequent associations of words in the text have led to the identification of the following proximity (words together): "a child must"(30 times), "children's future"(13 times), "children's education"(13 times), "children's participation"(8 times), "children in protests" (8 times), "civic education"(7 times), "civic responsibility"(7 times), "the source of learning"(7 times), "active implication matters"(7 times), "politic environment"(6 times), "participation in protests" (6 times), "to promote values" (5 times), "community's life"(5 times), "to involve children"(5

times), "the future society"(5 times), "it is a must to participate"(5 times), "the power of the example"(4 times), "the right to express"(4 times), "the participatory democracy"(3 times). Thus, the formed matrixes or the interrelated contextual groups of concepts which suggest the parental concern for mainly cultivating behavioural-active aspects and civic values as well as their will to be part of the community's life. Comparison of semantic links in text: 1. Analysis for the key concepts: *children* and *must*

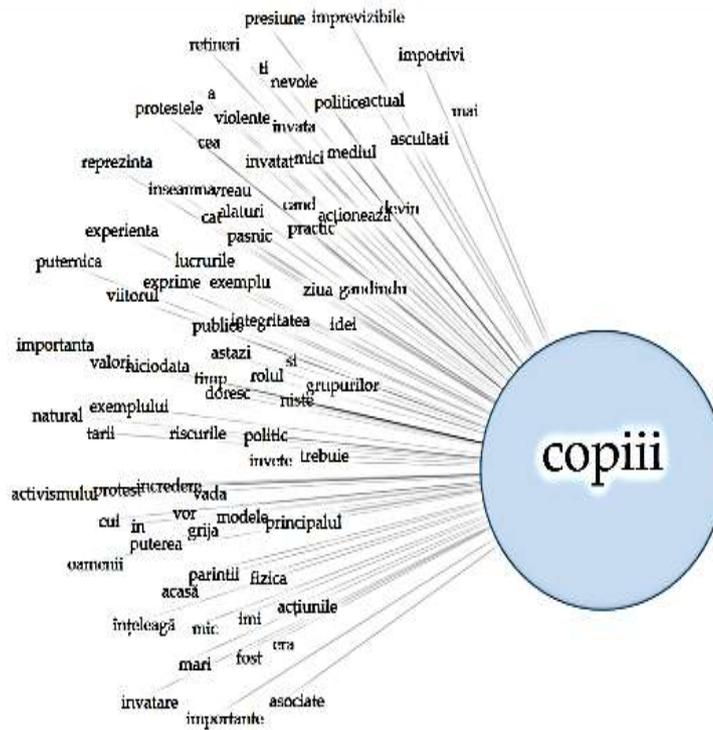


Figure 03. The centrality of the concept "children"

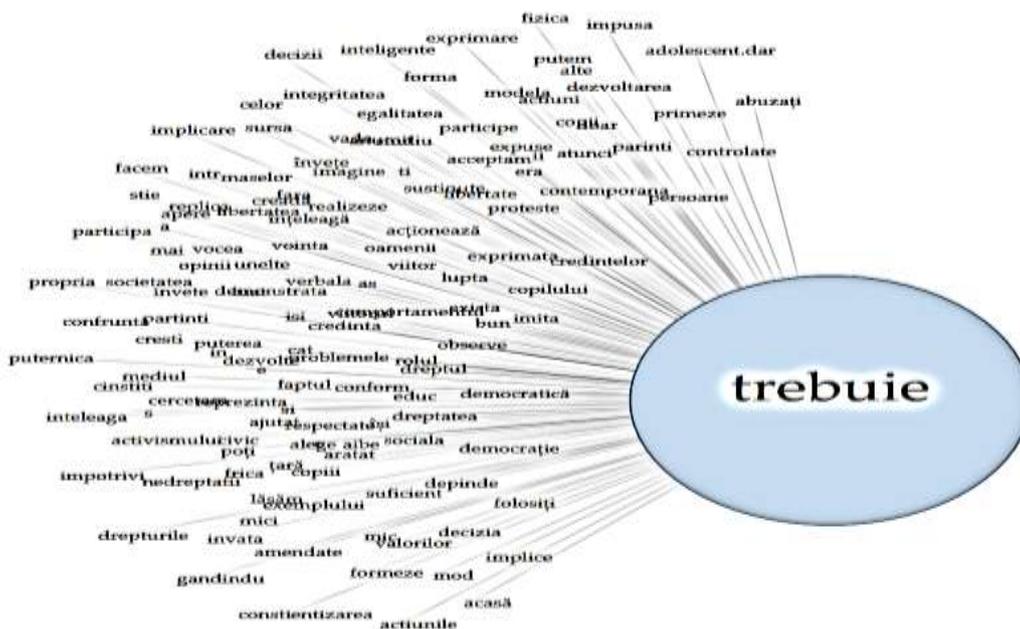


Figure 04. The centrality of the concept "must"

2. Analysis of relations between the most frequent concepts:

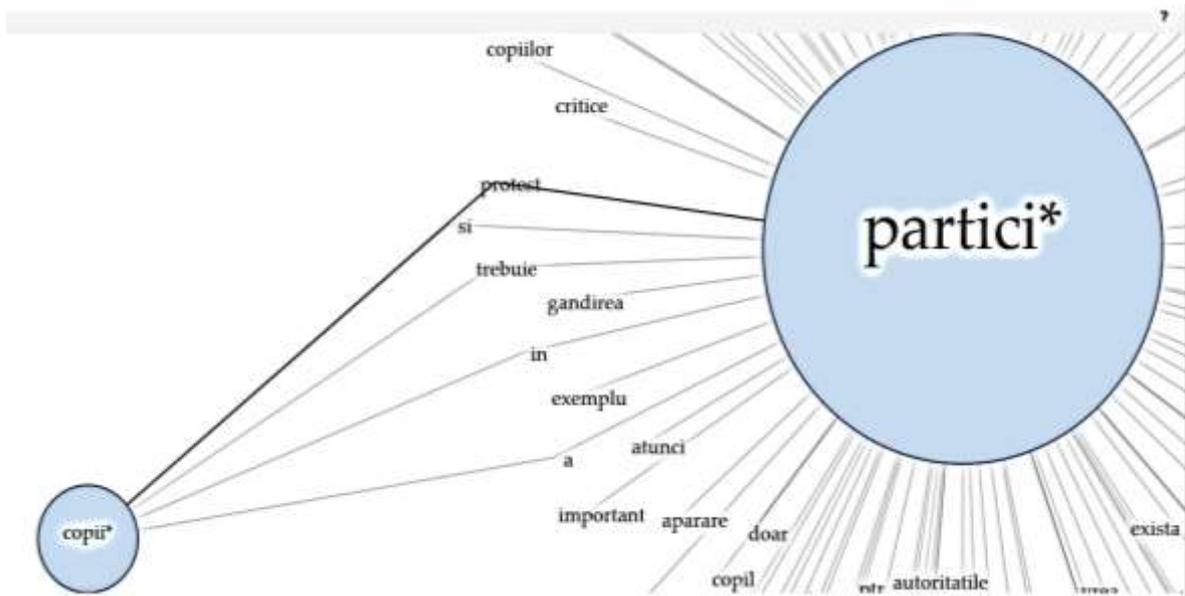


Figure 05. Relationship between the main indicators participate\* and children\*

1. behavioural-active dimension,

There are also two significant relationships between the codes children\* and participate\* (Figure 05), which highlight the intensity of the connection mediated by the words of the link, making a statement (two concepts and the relations between them).

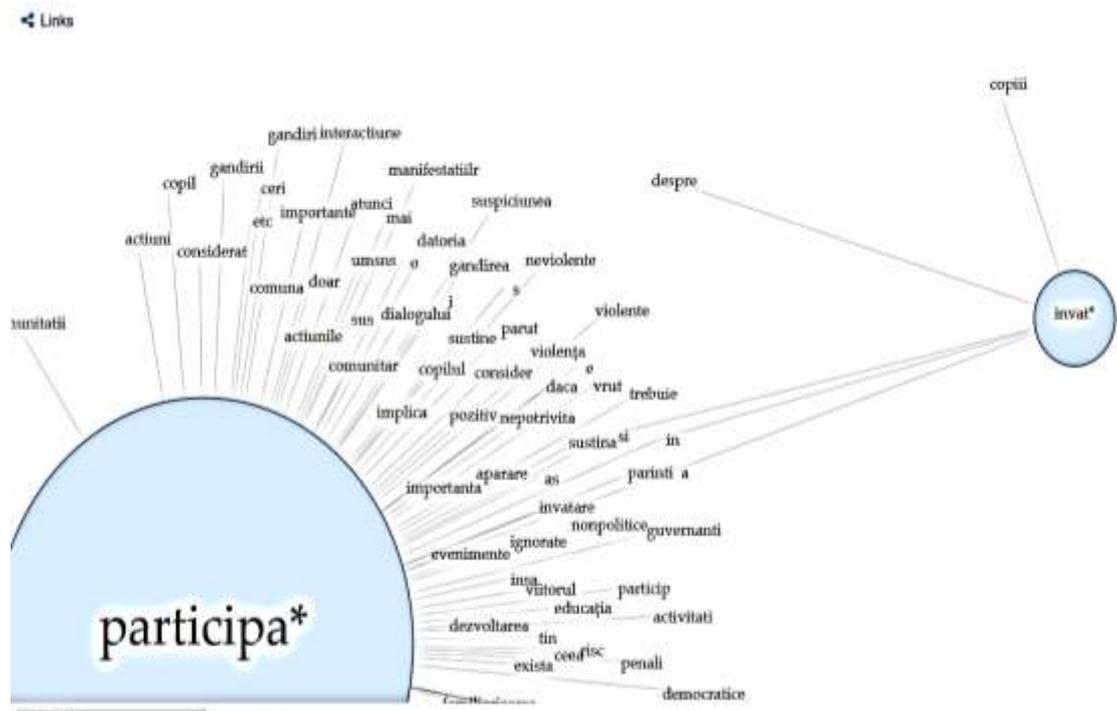


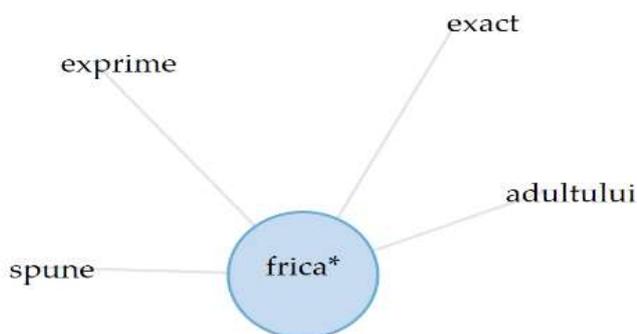
Figure 06. Relationship between the codes participate\* and learn\*

2. **cognitive dimension** - the centrality of the indicator learn\* (Figure 06) reveals, in addition to the logical structure of the two actors involved, the link between the children who learn and the parents who transmit messages.

We also identify relational indicators belonging to the active-behavioural sphere, "involvement", "expression", "intervention", "solving", "protests", "information", "protect" but also some of them related to the evaluative sphere: "good", "values", "community", "the others", "power", "secure", "independent", "political, "free". In other words, the content of learning mainly refers to behaviours, but also to appreciative and evaluative aspects. This relationship reveals that learning refers both to active and behavioural practice regarding the good example of parents and significant adults around.

Figure 06. The relationship between the codes participate\* and learn\*

1. **affective dimension** – the main analysis reveals affective aspects (Figure 07) such as “not to be fearful of saying”, “not being afraid to express yourself”.



**Figure 07.** The centrality of the indicator fear\*

The concept maps are tools for organizing and representing the information in the text unit. The concept map, as a graphical representation of the relations between concepts, aims to indicate the direction of the relationship between them, trying to create a model of the general meaning of the concept of value, which can offer the possibility to analyse them through comparison. There are two significant relationships involving the codes protest\* and must\*, which highlights the intensity of the relationship mediated by the link words, making a statement.

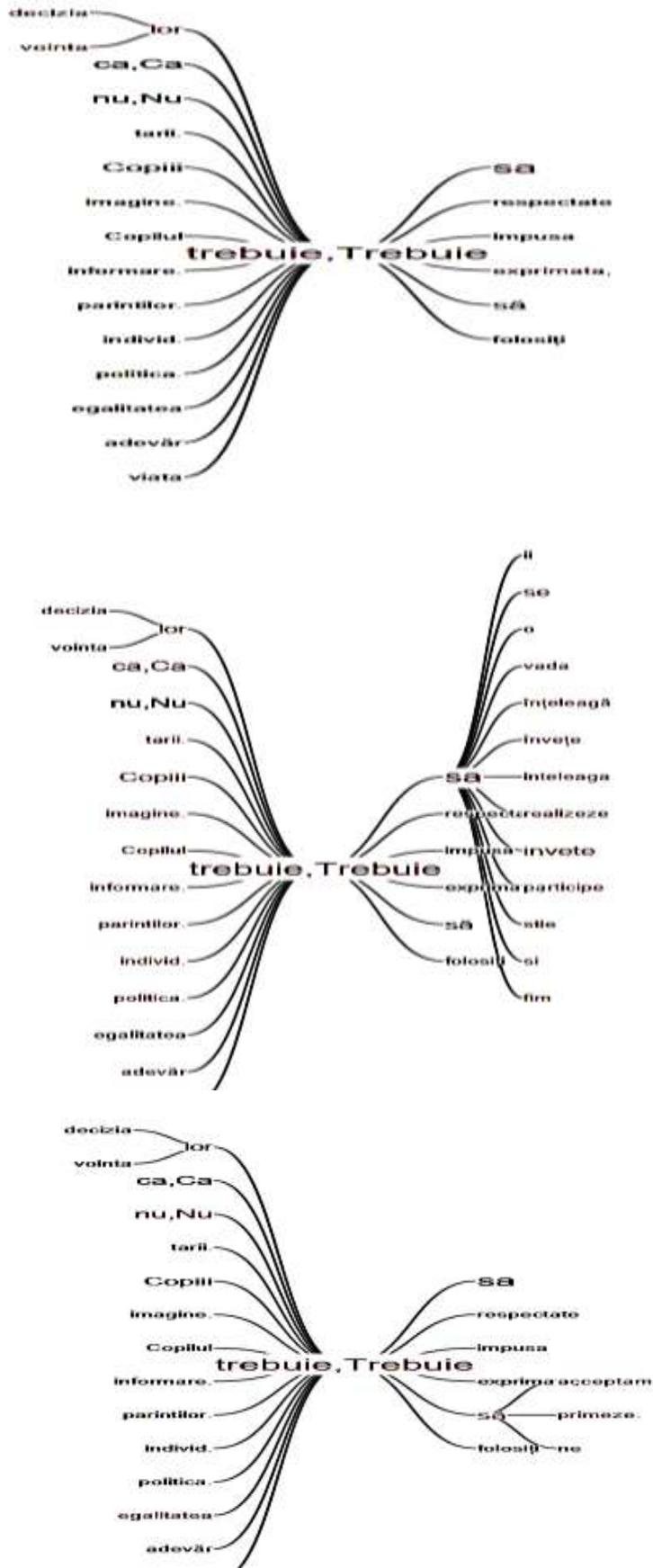


Figure 08. The concept map of the code must\*

The word "must" has been identified in the context of analysis as having the highest frequency among all the indicators, which has led us to deepen the analysis of its link with other concepts. Thus, by realizing the map-concept (Figure 08), we have discovered that the imperative, "must", has a direct connection with decision and will (volitional and active dimension), but also with elements belonging to the cognitive sphere such as "to learn", "to understand", "to see", as well as with verbs like "to accomplish", "to participate", "to accept", "to prevail".

## 7. Conclusion

Considering concepts in the form of "ideative nuclei" (Agabrian, 2006, p.99), identified in the respondents' answers to the three open questions in the online survey, we will consider that the ideological nuclei of the messages that parents want to convey to their children have a pronounced behavioural-action and an attitudinal predominance. Adults want to convince their children that there is a need (imperative "must") for involvement and participation, by following their example, with reference to the evaluative dimension. Another key concept that is related to the first one is the indicator civic\* which defines the attitude of the public protests and manifestations, although it is more recognized at the implicit level in the answers received and less explicitly in the written messages and in the messages displayed in public space on banners. Regarding the evaluative dimension, frequent reports are verbal testimonies such as "not to steal", "not to lie", placed in contrast to what is desirable. For children the message sent is the will to avoid doing what is not in accordance with the generally accepted civic and moral values. Although there were found in the parents' answers to the questionnaire, both references to cognitive and affective dimensions are at a secondary level related to the attitudinal and behavioural - active elements promoted. The emotional aspects invoked are "pride" and "love the country", this theoretical frame being mentioned in the analysis unit 3 times. What has been specifically and somewhat atypically has been the invocation of fear, denial, "not to be afraid," that refers to history, functioning as an intention to demolish, to defeat some fears of the past.

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